

Thursday, March 24, 2011

Dear Janet,

This letter is long past due, but I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to thank you for inviting me to participate in *Restoration of Spirit: The Glenwood Cemetery Site-Specific Theatre Project*. Little did I know that our conversation, just a year ago, would lead me into such a complex and rewarding path. I will always be grateful for the experience.

As I prepare to begin the last third of my MLS program, I am excited to see that the concepts in our textbooks and the ideas noted during lectures have begun to be synthesized from word to deed. I credit you for that. Our *THE 521/522 Devised Theatre I and II* classes were filled with examples and exercises geared to help us understand Devised Theatre, but it wasn't until I witnessed the entire process from start to finish that I really began to know the genre. *Glenwood: Restoration of Spirit* gave me the insight necessary to begin my own exploration and the courage to try.

In addition to the friendships formed during those long, summer days spent in research, writing, and rehearsal (and all of those are of great value to me), the connections I've made with my community have empowered me. My house may be on the outskirts of town, but my heart is in the city. In days past, it was easy to stay cocooned, only marginally aware of the issues that challenged Flint, but those days are long gone, Janet. Learning so much about America's past by learning about the people who brought Flint into existence, has made me pay more attention to the future of our city and what I can do to strengthen and support its vitality.

I won't soon forget the stories shared by the prior caretakers of Glenwood, as well as those whose loved ones rest there. It is inspiring to stand next to someone who is pointing to the grave of their only son and hear their calm description of his tragic passing, while announcing that they will one day rest by his side. Then, to see the current sexton playing with his children just a few feet away, in the yard where that deceased young man once frolicked, is to witness the legacy of Glenwood. I was happy to meet with the people at the Senior Citizen Centers as well and pleased to document the details that only a direct witness can add to history.

One of the things I most enjoyed was seeing your skill in collaboration. You clearly had a vision from the start but you were willing to listen to our ideas and were encouraging to each of us, in turn. Then, sifting so very carefully through all of our contributions, you mined the gold from the pan and made a treasure - in concept, in word, and in

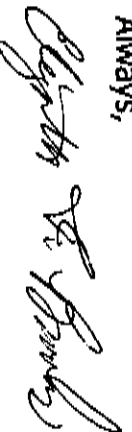
image. I am honored to have my name on that program, Janet. Of course you know that this experience has led me to study playwrighting last semester and collaborative play writing during this winter term. I am excited to share my ideas with the community and hope that they will be as inspired with my words as they were with those in Glenwood.

I remember your kindness after some of the colder performance nights; you would frequently send me back to UM Flint on the first shuttle. The double bonus of that experience was the feedback I got from the audience members during the trip to campus. It was clear that they had listened carefully and appreciated the story line. Their questions were insightful and often they had even more information to add to my research. I never knew how such a short bus ride could provide so much reward.

I know I go on about one specific moment more than I should, but the words of Mr. Rankin, combined with the vision of gold-tipped trees bathed in sunset have made a permanent brand on my heart. So, now I have begun Act II of my civic engagement venture, working with Andrew Morton on the arson project and hoping I can be a part of the next Glenwood presentation as well. Each process is the same, yet very different. And each allows me to extend myself further in to an understanding of the genre while serving my community. What a perfect plan for "retirement"!

Well you know how I love a good pun, so I'll end by saying that Glenwood continues to "haunt" me - every time I eat a pear, pass a street with a famous name, or drive by those lovely iron gates. When can we go back?

Always,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth F. Brooks', written in a cursive style.

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